

SPEED ZONES: “HOW DO I GET ONE INSTALLED?”

The California Vehicle Code (CVC) is very specific and clear when it comes to speed limits. City and County officials are given the authority to either lower the 55 mph maximum speed limit or raise the 25 mph business and residential speed limit if certain conditions are met and if prescribed procedures are followed.

The CVC requires local authorities to base speed limits on Engineering and Traffic Studies and not on arbitrary decisions. These studies are based on the fundamental assumption that most drivers are reasonable, law abiding citizens with a few (about 15%) driving too fast. The studies also consider speed related collisions and roadway conditions that may not be apparent to the driver. The speed that the “fast 15%” exceeds is called the *critical speed*. In California, the speed limit should be set at the first 5 mph increment below the critical speed. For example, if the “fast 15%” are driving faster than 48 mph, then the speed limit should be established at 45 mph. In situations where roadside conditions may present surprises to motorists, the speed limit can be lowered an additional 5 mph. In our

example, such conditions might justify a zone of 40 mph.



Now back to the original question... “What does it take to get a speed zone installed?” After receiving a request for a speed zone, Resource Management Agency staff completes the required Engineering and Traffic Study. The study includes:

- A review of all speed related collisions for a three year period.
- The measurement of existing speeds with a radar meter, using an unmarked vehicle.
- Calculating the *critical speed* (also called the 85th percentile speed).
- A survey of the roadway and roadside conditions.

If the Agency agrees that a speed zone is justified, a recommendation is presented to the Board of Supervisors. Should the Board approve the zone, signs are posted and enforcement can begin. Where local speed limits are to be enforced by radar or other electronic devices (such as laser meters), the studies must be no more than five years old.

Sometimes we hear, “You should have posted it lower. It would be safer.” Actually, research indicates just the opposite. Nearby residents are given a false sense of security because an unreasonably low speed limit makes almost every driver a violator and is considered a “speed trap” in California. Therefore, the courts will not hear such cases and, as a result, law enforcement agencies will not issue citations and speeds are unaffected.

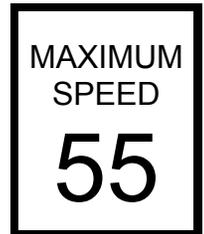
A special note about maximum speed limits in California - UNLESS POSTED OTHERWISE, THE MAXIMUM SPEED LIMITS ARE:

2-Lane roads=55 mph.

Multilane roads=65 mph.

Certain freeways=70 mph.

In any case, adjust your speed to current conditions.



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